

THE ROLE OF CONSTRUAL LEVEL IN ATTENTIONAL BIAS TOWARD TEMPTATION

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Introduction

People can construe stimuli in different levels of abstraction.

A **high level construal** is a mental representation that focuses on long term, abstract and context independent features.

A **low level construal** is a mental representation that focuses on proximal, tangible and context dependent features.

Self-control, the ability to choose an abstract goal over a proximal temptation, has previously been shown to be facilitated by high level construal (Fujita, Han, 2009).

One process that may be involved in the effect of construal level on self control and has yet to be empirically tested is **attentional bias**.

People exhibit an attentional bias toward certain objects. For instance, Jones et al. (2002) showed people change detection displays with either a substance-related change or a neutral change and found that participants who responded faster to the substance-related images reported higher levels of substance use (Jones, Jones, Blundell & Bruce, 2002).

Main Hypothesis: Construal level influences attentional bias toward temptation.

Methodology

Construal Level

Category – Exemplar Task

Category (High Level Construal)

A BOOK is an example of... _____

Exemplar (Low Level Construal)

An example of a BOOK is... _____

Change Blindness

An image is presented and then changed with a slight modification, with a mask in between.

The reaction time of the participant’s recognition of the change to the image is the measured variable (to either a temptation related change or a neutral change).

Tempting

Control

250 ms

80 ms

250 ms

250 ms

80 ms

250 ms



(Pattern repeats until participant observes the difference between images)

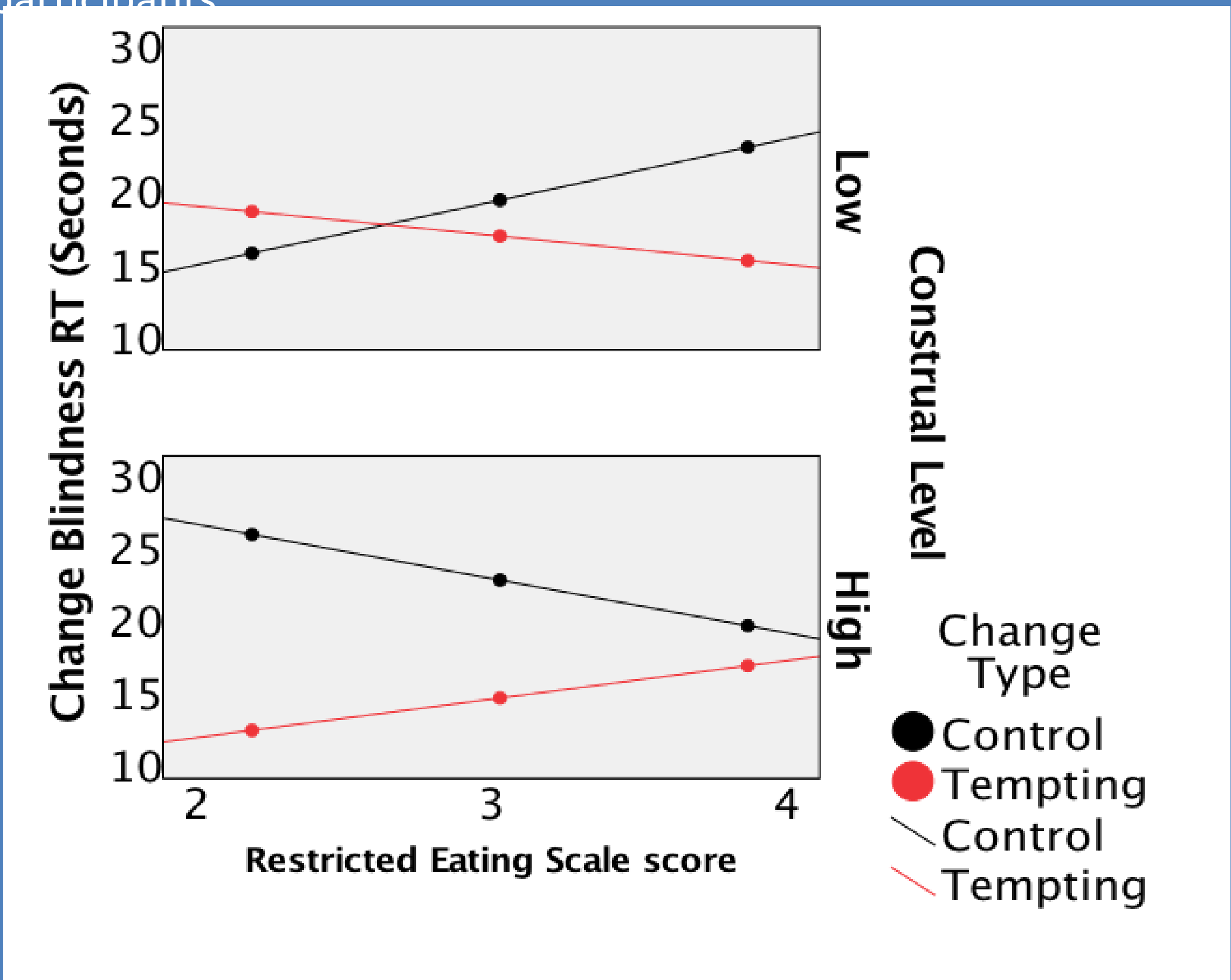
Dieters vs. Non-Dieters

We measured dieting status using the self-report Restricted Eating Scale.

Results

Sample: 257 Mturk participants. Mean age: 37.32 (11.68).

Participants who failed to correctly complete either the construal level manipulation (40) or the change blindness task (67), indicated that they were not serious about the experiment (8), or whose reaction time in the change blindness task was more than three standard deviations from the group mean (2) were eliminated from data analysis, leaving us with a sample of 140 participants



Construal level x Change type x RES score $t_{(132)} = 2.29$, $P=0.024$

Change type $t_{(132)} = 2.62$, $P=0.01$

Conclusion:

The results supported our hypothesis. Construal level moderated the relation between dieting status and change type so that dieters were slower to recognize temptations in the high level construal and were faster in the low level.

Future Direction:

We plan to replicate this experiment in the Ohio State REP pool, with a slightly different tempting stimuli.

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